

**PLANNING BOARD & PLANNING DEPARTMENT**  
Fiscal Year 2005

**INTRODUCTION**

This report provides a summary of the numerous land-use, planning, and zoning activities with which the Planning Board and Department were involved during fiscal year 2005.

**CURRENT PLANNING**

As always, development issues and applications occupied much of the time of the Board and Department during FY 05.

Table 1 provides a statistical review of the Department's activities, including the various permits it oversees, and zoning and other regulatory changes.

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**Table 1**  
**Planning Board**  
**Land Use & Zoning Activity**

<b>A.</b>	<b><u>Review &amp; Action</u></b>	<b><u># of Applications</u></b>
1.	Planning Board Special Permits	2
2.	Form A (Approval Not Required) Subdivisions	18
3.	Cluster Subdivision	1
4.	Standard Subdivision	1
5.	Subdivision Lot Releases	17
6.	Subdivision/Site Plan Escrow Releases	2
7.	Street Name Changes	0
8.	Development Authorization Requests	7
9.	Site Plan Review Requests	7
10.	Sign Plans Approved	2
11.	Lighting Plans Approved	1
12.	Scenic Road Requests	1
13.	Ch. 61A Removal Requests	2
<b>B.</b>	<b><u>Review &amp; Recommendation</u></b>	
1.	Zoning Amendments	11
2.	Rules & Regulations Amendments	0
3.	Special Permits/Variations	41
4.	Street Acceptances	7
5.	Street Discontinuances	1

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What follows is a summary of the more significant planning development proposals and issues of FY 05:

## **Commercial/Institutional**

- \* expansion of the Amherst Shopping Center totaling 18,580 sq. ft., along with proposed improvements to interior circulation and the University Drive entrance
- \* renovations to Amherst College's Hamilton House
- \* construction of a new vehicle lube and inspection facility at 118 South East Street
- \* new building façade materials and signage for the commercial building at 360 College Street
- \* an addition on the north side of Cows Building Supply at 125-127 Sunderland Road
- \* a non-profit manual arts (woodworking) facility for children at 170 Pine Street
- \* restoration of a religious residential facility with church offices at 367 North Pleasant Street.

## **Residential**

- \* in response to a second application, a second review and approval for the 20-unit Sunwood Pines, Amherst's first Open Space Community Development (OSCD)
- \* preliminary approval for Lawrence Circle, a 6-lot single family subdivision off Owen Drive
- \* preliminary approval for an 8-lot single family cluster subdivision on the former Simmons property south of Bay Road
- \* lot releases for home building in Amherst Hills (Hawthorne Road, Linden Ridge), Moody Fields, Morrow Lane, Station Road, and Palley Village.

## **Zoning Issues**

- \* Developed contract zoning for a property at 284 North Pleasant Street, permitting a rezoning from General Residence (R-G) to Limited Business (B-L) in exchange for restrictions on the range of possible uses on the property. Adopted by the fall 2004 Special Town Meeting.
- \* A technical correction (renumbering) of the "upland acreage" definition in Article 12. Adopted by the fall 2004 Special Town Meeting.
- \* Proposed an amendment to office regulations in the Professional Research Park (PRP), to allow technical and professional offices visited principally by appointment. Dismissed by the fall 2004 Special Town Meeting to allow potential traffic impacts to be further studied.
- \* Developed an amendment to Article 14, Phased Growth, in response to a court case invalidating "growth restraint" bylaws except under certain limited circumstances.

Proposed to establish a sunset of five years during which the Town would complete a master plan. Adopted by the fall 2004 Special Town Meeting.

- \* Responded to a request by a property owner on Northampton Road to rezone their property from Professional Research Park (PRP) to Limited Business (B-L). Defeated by the fall 2004 Special Town Meeting.
- \* Responded to a citizen petition to rezone the majority of parcels in the Northampton Road/Snell Street area from Professional Research Park (PRP) to Neighborhood Residence (R-N). Defeated by the fall 2004 Special Town Meeting (Yes 59, No 72 – 2/3rds not obtained).
- \* Developed a preliminary permit step for the Open Space Community Development (OSCD) method, to address public participation difficulties which arose during the first OSCD permit process. Referred back to the Planning Board by the fall 2004 Special Town Meeting. Defeated by the 2005 Annual Town Meeting despite majority support (Yes 100, No 57 – 2/3rds majority not obtained).
- \* Developed amendments to Section 5.011 to permit accessory supplemental apartments in the R-G District and amend floor area requirements. Adopted by the 2005 Annual Town Meeting.
- \* Developed amendments to the dimensional requirements for cluster developments including a minimum of 10% affordable housing units. Adopted by the 2005 Annual Town Meeting.
- \* Proposed to amend the Official Zoning map to change the Town property east of Olympia Drive from Fraternity Residence (R-F) to Neighborhood Residence (R-N). Adopted by the 2005 Annual Town Meeting.
- \* Developed amendments to the dimensional requirements for additional lot area per unit in the R-G and R-VC Districts. At the request of the Planning Board, the 2005 Annual Town Meeting referred the amendment back to the Board.
- \* Developed a new Article 15 consolidating and expanding inclusionary requirements for affordable housing. Adopted by the 2005 Annual Town Meeting.

## **COMPREHENSIVE/COMMUNITY PLANNING**

Efforts continued on a number of long-range planning issues, while new issues and projects also involved the time and attention of the Board and Department.

### **Mt. Tom/Mt. Holyoke**

Joining with other cities and towns whose areas include parts of the Mt. Holyoke Range, the Planning Board and Department continued to participate in a regional effort to protect the Mt. Tom and Mt. Holyoke ranges, including the development of a model zoning bylaw to coordinate land use regulations governing development on the Range.

Bob Grose continued to serve as the Planning Board representative to the Summit Land Use Task Force. Interim Planning Director Jonathan Tucker was the Town's staff liaison to the Task Force.

### **Comprehensive Plan**

At the request of the Comprehensive Planning Committee, the fall 2004 Special Town Meeting appropriated \$20,000:

to develop a public participation process, a comprehensive Scope of Services, a Request for Proposals, and cost estimates for the completion of a Master Plan as required under Massachusetts General Laws 41, Section 81D.

Planning Department staff assisted the Comprehensive Planning Committee with the development of an RFP and selection of a consultant (Land Use, Inc.) to help fulfill this charge, and with the conduct of the ensuing public outreach process and other related tasks in FY 05.

### **Executive Order 418**

The Planning Department continued to work with other Town departments, boards and committees to update and implement a number of studies developed for the E.O. 418 Community Development Plan requirements, and to carry out recommended actions under those plans:

- \* 2003 Affordable Housing Plan
- \* Open Space & Recreation Plan update
- \* University Drive Corridor Traffic Study

At the end of the year, the Planning Department submitted an update to the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) summarizing changes to Amherst's housing stock in FY 05.

### **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program**

Responding to Amherst's designation as a Mini-Entitlement Community in September 2004, the Planning Department assisted the Community Services Department and other Town departments, boards and committees to assure the community's eligibility through the development and submission of related plans, and to prepare and review projects for the community's FY 05 application.

The Planning Department also continued to manage remaining outstanding CDBG housing rehab loans from past CDBG projects, responding to several requests to close out, subordinate, or amend such loans.

### **Commonwealth Capital Program**

The Planning Department successfully prepared Amherst's first application for the newly created Commonwealth Capital program, a program whereby eligibility for and access to state grant funds are affected by the Town's score on an extensive list of sustainable development criteria. Amherst's application was assigned the sixth highest score in the state.

## **Downtown**

The Town continued the redesign and reconstruction of downtown sidewalks. The Planning Department assisted the Department of Public Works with development of designs for new sidewalk connections at the north end of Boltwood Walk, and worked with the Berkshire Design Group, DPW, and Town boards and committees to begin development of designs for streetscape improvements on the east side of North Pleasant Street between Main Street and Kellogg Avenue.

Both the Department and the full Board met with Amherst College representatives to review and comment on proposed changes in roadway design and crosswalks along the stretch of South Pleasant Street between Northampton Road and Snell Street.

## **Housing**

The Planning Department worked with the Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee (HP/FHC), Amherst Housing Authority (AHA), and the Community Preservation Act Committee to develop and pursue a number of projects to protect existing affordable housing units and provide for the creation of new affordable units. The HP/FHC met with Planning staff and the Planning Board's Zoning Subcommittee to develop a group of significant amendments to the Zoning Bylaw to mandate and encourage affordability in new residential development. Several such amendments were adopted by the 2005 Annual Town Meeting (see Zoning Issues.)

## **Historic Preservation**

The Amherst Preservation Plan, the historic preservation component of a community master plan, was completed and approved in May 2005, following several years of work by the Planning staff, Historical Commission, and consultants Martha Lyon and William Geizentanner. The Plan is available on the Town website from the Historical Commission's webpage.

Using the Plan as its guide, the Commission worked with Planning staff to develop proposals for several major historic preservation projects using CPA funds. The 2005 Annual Town Meeting appropriated a total of \$242,500 in CPA funds for these projects.

Following a highly successful community effort by the Historical Commission to raise funds (over \$41,000), in April 2005 mural artist David Fichter began installation of the Amherst Community History Mural on the east (rear) wall of the Carriage Shops with the help of community volunteers. The mural dedication ceremony was held June 16. Planning staff helped to coordinate the project and develop a brochure interpreting West Cemetery and the mural.

## **Atkins Corner**

Using the planning principles and design guidelines of Atkins Corner Plan, with the assistance of Congressman John Olver and MassHighway, the Planning Department and DPW obtained federal highway funds for the redesign of the intersection and road system in this proposed new village center. Solicitation and selection of consulting engineers to design the new West Street/Bay Road intersection and roadway improvements was completed during FY 05 and the preliminary design process begun.

## **STAFF ASSISTANCE**

Planning Department staff provide professional support and technical assistance to numerous Town boards and committees, local and regional boards, as well as Amherst citizens, community groups, other communities, and others. The Town boards and committees to whom the Planning Department was assigned in FY 05 included:

- ❖ Planning Board
- ❖ Zoning Subcommittee
- ❖ Atkins Corner Working Group
- ❖ Design Review Board
- ❖ Zoning Board of Appeals
- ❖ Town/Commercial Relations Committee
- ❖ Historical Commission
- ❖ Comprehensive Planning Committee
- ❖ Redevelopment Authority (inactive)
- ❖ Economic Development and Industrial Corporation (inactive)
- ❖ Overall Economic Development Planning Committee (inactive)
- ❖ GIS Committee
- ❖ UMass Campus Planning Committee

Other committees for whom the Planning staff provide occasional assistance as needed include:

- ❖ Public Transportation Committee & Bicycle Subcommittee
- ❖ Disabilities Access Advisory Committee
- ❖ Parking Commission
- ❖ Public Art Commission
- ❖ Community Preservation Act Committee
- ❖ Public Shade Tree Committee
- ❖ Greater Franklin County Economic Development Strategy Committee
- ❖ Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
- ❖ Massachusetts Geographic Information Council
- ❖ Summit Land Use Task Force
- ❖ Amherst Energy Task Force
- ❖ Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee

## **PLANNING BOARD**

During FY 05, new members Rod Francis, Carl Mailler, and Mary Scipioni were appointed to the Board. Long-time member (6 years) Pam Rooney completed her full term. Members Elizabeth Hyman and Peter Vickery resigned prior to the end of their terms.

Planning Board members took advantage of training opportunities sponsored by the Citizen Planner Training Collaborative and training from Town Counsel Alan Seewald.

At the end of the year, the Planning Board consisted of: Paul Bobrowski (Chair), Aaron Hayden (Vice-Chair), Pamela Rooney (Clerk), Christopher Boyd, Adrian Fabos, Rod Francis, David Kastor, Carl Mailler, and Mary Scipioni.

## PLANNING STAFF

Planning Department Intern James Errickson, a graduate student in planning at the University of Massachusetts, completed his program of studies and was hired as an Associate Planner by the City of Lowell's Division of Planning and Development. The new Planning intern, Cana McCoy, is a graduate student at the UMass Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning.

During FY 05, Planning Department personnel engaged in a wide variety of public outreach, including presentations to a number of community groups, and the publication of *Planning Briefs*, a new Department newsletter highlighting community planning projects, personnel, and issues of interest to the community.

Jonathan Tucker served as Interim Director during FY 05. Other Planning Department staff included Senior Planner Niels la Cour, Associate Planner Christine Brestrup, Zoning Assistant Carolyn Holstein, and Management Assistant Sue Krzanowski.

*Paul Bobrowski*  
Chair

*Jonathan Tucker*  
Interim Planning Director